

The Making of Victorian Sexuality. By MICHAEL MASON. Pp. x + 338. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994. £17.95.

The Making of Victorian Sexual Attitudes. By MICHAEL MASON. Pp. xii + 256. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994. £17.99.

Sex in Georgian England: Attitudes and Prejudices from the 1720s to the 1820s. By A. D. HARVEY. Pp. viii + 206. London: Duckworth, 1994. £20.

The stigmatization of 'Victorian', as connoting prudishness and hypocrisy, is an early twentieth-century development, perhaps, as Michael Mason suggests intriguingly, in response to the social purity movement. The subsequent historiography of 'Victorian sexuality' is a topic with which Mr Mason does not engage but which nevertheless has shaped his most basic assumptions, as a brief summary will indicate.

The revival of interest in Victorian sexuality in the 1960s, represented by Steven Marcus's *The Other Victorians* (1966) and popular accounts such as Ronald Pearsall's *The Worm in the Bud* (1969), complete with 'Sin Map of London', was marked by a gleeful prurience in its unmasking of the furtive sexuality behind the strait-laced façade of middle-class propriety. Like John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), these are texts which condescendingly caricature the Victorians from the perspective of the 'liberated' 1960s. Their misrepresentation of the Victorians is still apparent even in Mason's scrupulously discriminating survey: namely, the reduction of the erotic to physical sexuality. In the 1970s there emerged more differentiated accounts of Victorian sexuality, exemplified by Eric Trudgill's influential *Madonnas and Magdalens* (1976). These were succeeded by Foucauldian analyses such as Jeffrey Weeks's *Sex, Politics, and Society* (1981) and by precise investigations of more specialized themes, as in Judith Walkowitz's *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (1980). Michael Mason's books profit from this recent historical scholarship, give a wide berth to Foucault and the Foucauldians, and convincingly undermine the stereotypes of the new academic orthodoxy, such as the Madonna/whore polarization. Walkowitz's 1980 book was symptomatic also of a committed interest in Victorian sexuality on the part of largely left-wing women historians, heralding the fashionable preoccupations of the later 1980s and 1990s with Foucauldian 'discourses', with madness and hysteria, and with transgression and the social construction of gender differences. Mason briefly discusses the new feminist historians apropos of the social purity movement and the agitation for women's rights but otherwise passes over recent publications. His *terminus ad quem* of 1880 excludes both the *fin de siècle*, in which Victorian sexual attitudes were arguably at their most fascinating and most contested, and the repercussions of the increasing social mobility of women in late nineteenth-century England, illuminated in Walkowitz's *City of Dreadful Delight* (1992). Mason's chronological limits take in the controversial Contagious Diseases Acts but rule out the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, with the notorious Labouchère Amendment. Indeed, homosexuality in general is a glaring omission from his narratives—but then male and female 'friendship' requires discussion in the wider context of 'eroticism' rather than in Mason's disappointingly literalist interpretation of 'sexuality'.

Rather awkwardly, Mason's argument is spread over two books: the first is concerned largely with sexual practices; the second, somewhat of an anti-climax, discusses ideological attitudes at considerable length, covering the major religious and secular movements, with perhaps disproportionate attention to millenarian fringe groups and Owenite socialism, and the controversies attending contraception and free love. Mason's most interesting revisionist arguments are: that the major influences on Victorian anti-sensualism came not from Evangelicalism but instead from progressive secularist opinion and from what he terms 'classic moralism'; that, despite the popular

stereotypes of marital inhibition, the dominant references to Victorian marriages stress sensual fulfilment, while medical texts depict not the absence of female sexual desire but rather the indispensability to conception of the female orgasm (although, Mason reminds us, these are texts which almost exclusively served male sexual interests). As Mason observes acutely, the cliché of Victorian female sexual passivity may well have originated in the widely held belief that having an orgasm would result in pregnancy: 'The sad reality of a Victorian married woman's sex-life which modern prejudice has created, of joyless inhibition and ignorance, is quite unhistorical, but it must give way to a reality which may sometimes have been sadder: of women fearing and regretting sexual pleasure because they above all wished to avoid having another child.' Mason recounts how, from the first twenty years of the nineteenth century onwards, working-class ideals of self-improvement and respectability envisaged the subordination of the libido; in this environmentalist linking of progress with sexual continence they resembled several post-Enlightenment defences of human perfectibility against Malthus's thesis of an invariant sexual drive. This is a salutary reminder of the association of sexual restraint with progressive thought (familiar also in early feminism). My own intuition, however, is that Mason's reattribution of anti-sensual influences underplays the importance of religion in forging a distinctively middle-class culture, as emphasized in Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's *Family Fortunes* (1987). A further salutary corrective to unexamined orthodoxy is Mason's insistence that, despite his extraordinary academic currency for the last thirty years, William Acton's dismissal of female desire was utterly atypical of Victorian medical opinion. The accompanying demographic surveys of rates and age of marriage, illegitimacy, prostitution, birth control and so forth are not new, but offer an excellent digest of the best available scholarship.

Curiously, for a literature specialist, Mason scarcely refers to literary sources; just as surprisingly, he treats the sexual athleticism of the egregious 'Walter' in *My Secret Life* as fact and not fiction. He would perhaps argue that we accord too much weight to literature but it is surely through literary discourse that we best gain imaginative access to the subtle nuances of subjective experience. His documentation is impressively wide-ranging, although his habit of accumulating several sources in a single footnote is historiographically dubious: on a practical level, it is difficult to establish which section of a paragraph is to be attributed to which source; more significantly, the frequent running together of texts from a broad chronological range (vol. i, p. 117 n. 28, for example, juxtaposes texts from 1809, 1851, 1875, 1837, 1790, 1875, 1817, and so on) suggests a misleading consistency of opinion. The marshalling of statistical evidence, the authority and interpretative significance of which Mason himself acknowledges to be far from straightforward, is also a mixed blessing. Can one maintain an academic poker face with statements such as: 'It has been calculated . . . that London female servants who became pregnant . . . had had intercourse seldom: on average four times.'? Apart from the inherent risibility of such quantifying pedantry and the elusiveness of actual data about this sexual Russian roulette, such statements reveal nothing about how sexuality was subjectively experienced.

Unlike Mr Mason, A. D. Harvey relies largely on literary evidence in his anthology of Georgian sexual 'attitudes and assumptions'. He proceeds empirically, with no pretensions to theoretical rigour, but his popular tone belies his considerable scholarship, for Dr Harvey (who has published widely on this period) has digested an impressively broad range of source material. He writes interestingly on the eighteenth-century fascination with seduction but relative indifference to rape, noting that the reduction of a woman's identity and her sexuality to her maidenhead made the fact of deflorate more important than how it took place. He is also well informed about recent work on

eighteenth-century homosexual subcultures, and contributes valuable material on this topic. Although this is a book with no real thesis and little profound analysis, it offers nevertheless a useful compilation of sources from which other scholars will surely profit.

Universität St Gallen

ALAN ROBINSON

Dickens's Journalism. Edited by MICHAEL SLATER. Vol. I, *Sketches by Boz and Other Early Papers 1833–39*. Pp. xlii + 580 (Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens' Journalism 1). London: J. M. Dent, 1994. £30.

This is the first in a series of four reprintings of the journalism which Dickens presented in collected form during his lifetime. It uses the text of the 1868 Charles Dickens Edition, adding to it papers from *Bentley's Miscellany*. In this it follows the practice of Dent's Everyman's Library edition and the Oxford Illustrated Dickens. Where it differs from them is in adding the 1836 pamphlet, *Sunday Under Three Heads*, appropriate because of its date, and in four omissions: 'The Public Life of Mr. Tulrumbles' on the grounds that it comes in the category of shorter fiction rather than journalism; the spurious 'Mr. Robert Bolton, the "Gentleman connected with the Press"'; *Sketches of Young Gentlemen*; and *Sketches of Young Couples*. One assumes that these sketches are omitted because *Young Couples* is a year outside the prescribed dates of this volume, and because Dickens did not include either in any collection of his works.

The value of this new edition lies in its scholarly apparatus and its annotations. Michael Slater's introduction untangles the complicated history of the *Sketches by Boz*. It sets them in the context of Dickens's life and work at that period, gives an account of their first appearance, whether in magazines or, as in a few cases, specially written for volume publication, and notes the textual revisions and rearrangements that Dickens made for the different series and editions. The details of first publication are also clearly given in tabulated form, and expanded, where necessary, in the headnotes which prefix each sketch. The life and work, up to 1839, are also tabulated, along with information about the historical and literary background. Other aids to study are a select bibliography, a map of London in 1837, and all Dickens's prefaces to the *Sketches*.

All this is helpful for the student and the scholar, but it is the headnotes, together with the index and glossary which provide the real interest. By their means we are brought closer to the London of the 1830s than our former readings, ignorant of so many fascinating details, allowed. We become more aware of Dickens's particularity in describing time, place, and people; we notice the number of popular songs and understand the slang—the difference between 'three-outs' and a 'go' for instance; we share the interest in contemporary celebrities such as politicians, entertainers, and murderers; and we see more clearly how local institutions and customs affected daily life. Unfortunately the index occasionally fails in its pagination. In particular, some Artful Dodger seems to have been at work in confounding the references to Newgate, whether Prison, Calendar, Market, or Street.

My other reservation is about the illustrations. The fuzziness of the map makes consultation tedious and the forty Cruikshank illustrations, although larger, have lost the fine detail of the reproductions found in the nineteenth-century Chapman and Hall publications or the Oxford Illustrated Edition. Furthermore, there are slight differences between a few of the new Dent and the old Oxford reproductions and it would be interesting to know, since Cruikshank re-etched the illustrations for their publication in monthly parts, more of the provenance of those presented here. Sadly, too, the three Phiz illustrations for *Sunday Under Three Heads* are not given.

The question remains as to whether annotated productions such as this, useful and